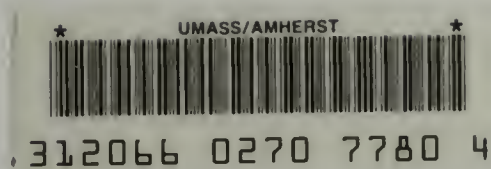


MASS. HS 20.2: F 74/3



**FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION AND FOOD SECURITY OF HOUSEHOLDS
LEAVING WELFARE**

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE

February 2000

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1995 participants in the food stamp program have declined both in Massachusetts and nationally by approximately one-third. To the extent that this decline is the result of economic gains by low-income workers, the trend is encouraging. Data from an earlier study¹ by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), however, indicate that approximately one-sixth of former cash assistance² households had food problems and was not receiving food stamps.

To better understand the dynamics of food stamp participation, the Department conducted this study of former welfare households, and emphasized food security. We randomly selected 873 households whose welfare case had closed between September 1, 1998 and November 14, 1998³ for in-depth interviews. After we eliminated cases that did not meet the criteria for the study⁴, we were able to complete 582 interviews for a response rate of 79.4%. We paid respondents \$25 for the interviews which were done between March and May 1999, approximately four to eight months after the households left welfare.

FINDINGS

We collected post-welfare data on food stamp participation, reasons for not using food stamps, food stamp eligibility, food security, and food assistance. We also asked households about their well-being, employment, earnings, family income and household arrangement.⁵

FOOD STAMP RECEIPT. Nearly all respondent households (95.7%) had been receiving food stamps at the time their welfare case closed. Close to one in four, 22.9%, was receiving food stamps at the time of the interview. More than one-half (54.5%) of respondents had received food stamps at some point after their TAFDC case closed.

REASONS FOR NOT USING FOOD STAMPS. The 449 households not receiving food stamps at the time of the interview gave 929 reasons, or an average of 2.1 reasons per household, for not participating in the program. The most common explanation for not receiving food stamps was that respondents presumed they were ineligible, cited by nearly half (47.2%) of those households not receiving food stamps. The second most common

¹ Massachusetts' Department of Transitional Assistance; *How Are They Doing? A Longitudinal Study of Households Leaving Welfare Under Massachusetts Reform*; April 1999.

² Cash assistance refers to payments from the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program, implemented in Massachusetts as the Temporary Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program. Throughout this report welfare and cash assistance are used interchangeably with TAFDC. Food stamps are not included unless specified as such.

³ These closings occurred before the time limit took effect in December 1998. The Department has contracted with the Center for Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts/Boston to conduct a separate survey of closed cases, many of which will be time limit closings.

⁴ To be included, households must not have received cash assistance since they left in late 1998, and must not have moved out of state. In addition, because we were particularly concerned about the food security of children, at least one child who was in the household when the welfare case closed must have been living with the respondent at the time of the interview.

⁵ We also asked about child care utilization, another important post-cash assistance support. Those results are not included here.

explanation, given by one-quarter (24.1%) of households not receiving food stamps, was that they did not need them. Other reasons cited were that they:

- ❑ found it inconvenient to go to the office to apply (22.3%).
- ❑ believed there was too much paperwork (21.4%).
- ❑ did not know that food stamps was a separate program from welfare (21.2%).
- ❑ did not want welfare (17.4%).
- ❑ believed benefits would be too small to bother (16.0%).
- ❑ thought that food stamps were not worth the trouble (14.7%).
- ❑ had another reason, mainly that they had applied or would apply, or that they had been denied (22.7%).⁶

ESTIMATES OF FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY AFTER WELFARE. This study of food stamp participation was unique in that Departmental staff who interviewed former cash assistance recipients also offered to perform a preliminary assessment of their food stamp eligibility. Of the 449 households not receiving food stamps, 331 (73.7%) took advantage of the opportunity. Interviewers classified 182 of the 331 households who accepted the offer (55.0%) as possibly eligible. The estimated median food stamp benefit for the 182 possibly eligible households was \$170 a month, and the estimated mean benefit was \$182 a month. Using administrative records, we determined that 38.5% of the possibly eligible households participated in the food stamp program after the interview, and received average food stamp benefits of \$203 a month. Participation levels appear to be correlated with potential benefit levels. Low benefit households were much less likely to have participated in the food stamp program after the interview. Only 23.4% of households with estimated benefits less than \$96 a month participated in the food stamp program after the interview, compared to 43.7% of households with estimated benefits greater than that.

FOOD SECURITY. We estimate that, after leaving welfare, one-third of respondent households (31.1%) was food insecure, that is, these families were not always assured of having a nutritionally adequate diet because of financial constraints.⁷ In comparison, 27.5% of respondents were food insecure during their final months on welfare. Most households (76.4%) did not experience a change in their food situation after leaving welfare. (Three-fifths of households (58.9%) were food secure both on and off welfare. Slightly less than one-fifth (17.5%) was food insecure both on and off welfare.) Ten percent (10.0%) of households improved their food security after leaving welfare. For 13.6% of households, their food situation got worse. Households not receiving food stamps but classified as possibly eligible were more likely to show signs of food insecurity than were other households⁸.

⁶ Because respondents could give more than one reason, the total is greater than 100%.

⁷ Food insecurity is officially defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” (Price, et al; “Household Food Security in the United States: Guide to Implementing the Core Food Security Module”; prepared for U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Consumer Service; contract no. 53-3198-5-028; September 1997.) Following guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), we classified households as food insecure if they gave two or more affirmative answers to survey questions about their food situation.

⁸ Other households include those receiving food stamps when interviewed, those who declined an eligibility determination at the interview, and those determined ineligible at the interview.

FOOD ASSISTANCE. Respondents were slightly more likely to get assistance with food during the final months on welfare than after leaving. Forty-six percent of respondents (46.4%) received food assistance during the last three months on welfare, compared to 43.0% who did so after welfare. Family and friends were by far the most common source of help. Approximately one-third of respondents received some form of assistance from family and friends during the final months on welfare (36.3%) as well as after welfare (35.2%). Food banks and food pantries were the second most common sources of help, but respondents' reliance on these supports dropped considerably after leaving welfare. Seventeen percent (17.0%) of households used food banks and food pantries during the final months on welfare compared to 11.9% reporting such use after welfare. Use of food kitchens and shelter meals was very small, under two percent for both time periods.

WELL-BEING, EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS, FAMILY INCOME, HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENTS. In addition to questions on food stamp participation and food security, we asked respondents about their well-being, employment, earnings, family income and household arrangements.

Well-Being: Similar to findings from the Department's earlier study of closed cases⁹, a clear majority of respondents, 83.0%, reported that they were better off or the same *financially* since leaving welfare. An even higher percentage of respondents, 86.5%, said that they were *generally* better off or the same since leaving welfare.

Households not receiving food stamps but classified as possibly eligible expressed less satisfaction with their financial and general well-being after leaving welfare than food stamp households and households classified as ineligible or whose food stamp status was unknown.

Employment: Nearly nine in ten respondents (88.8%) reported that an adult in the household (either the respondent or a partner) had worked at some time since leaving welfare. Three-quarters of respondents (74.6%) were working an average of 33 hours weekly at the time of the interview, with a median of 35 hours. Respondents' median earnings were \$270 weekly, and average earnings were \$289 weekly.

Seventy-three (73) partners were working at the time of the interview which represents 54.5% of the 134 partners present. Partners worked, on average, 37.8 hours weekly, with a median of 40 hours. Partners' median earnings were \$340, with average earnings of \$381 weekly.

Four of five households (79.7%) had an adult (respondent or partner) working at the time of the interview. In two-thirds of the households (67.2%), only the respondent was working, while in 5.2% of the households only the partner was working, and in 7.4% of the households both the respondent and partner were working.

⁹ *How Are They Doing? A Longitudinal Study of Households Leaving Welfare Under Massachusetts Reform*, April 1999, p. 9. In the earlier study, three-quarters (74.1%) reported being financially better off or the same after leaving welfare. Eighty percent (79.5%) reported generally feeling better off or the same after welfare.

Family Income. More than two-fifths of households (43.0%) reported family income greater than \$15,600 yearly, with 11.9% reporting family income greater than \$26,080. One-quarter of households (27.6%) reported yearly income of less than \$10,361. Median family income was \$14,389 annually.

Household/Living Arrangements. Eighty-eight (88) or 15.1% of respondent households had a partner present at the time they left assistance compared to 134 households (23.0%) who had a partner present at the time of the interview. The number of children in respondent households was virtually the same for the two periods (1,139 children in the households during the final months on welfare compared to 1,135 children present at the time of the interview). Ninety-five (95) other individuals (not partners or children) were in respondent households at the time the families left welfare compared to 115 at the time of the interview.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study indicate that food stamp participation is a complex phenomenon. The 449 households not receiving food stamps at the time of the interview gave 929 reasons, or an average of 2.1 reasons per household, for not participating in the program. Nearly half (47.2%) said they presumed they were ineligible. The second most common explanation for not participating in the food stamp program, given by one-quarter (24.1%) of these households, was that they did not need food stamps. Twenty-two percent (22.3%) found it inconvenient to go to the office to apply, the third most frequent reason.

Only 38.5% of the respondents who were told during the survey that they were likely eligible for food stamps had participated in the program between their interview date (March through May 1999) and September 30, 1999. However, participation appears to be related to potential benefit levels. Not surprisingly, low benefit households were less likely to participate in the food stamp program than were high benefit households. Only one-quarter of households with estimated benefits of less than \$96 a month participated in the program after the interview, compared to 43.7% of households with estimated benefits greater than that.

We estimate that one-third of respondent households (31.1%) was food insecure after leaving welfare, compared to 27.5% during the final months on welfare. Families that were not receiving food stamps who were classified as possibly eligible were most at risk for food insecurity. Forty-two percent (42.3%) of possibly eligible households showed signs of food insecurity after leaving welfare, compared to 28.6% of food stamp recipient households and 26.2% of households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown.

The Department is taking a number of steps to improve the food security of low-income families including:

- ❑ Funding the F.O.R. Families program operated by the Department of Public Health at \$2.9 million for state FY2000. Public Health staff follow up with all households that leave TAFDC because of the time limit and that do not recertify for food stamps (among other at-risk households) to inform them about the food stamp program and additional services that are available to assist in their transition to self-sufficiency.
- ❑ Funding food stamp outreach services provided by Project Bread (Boston), Community Teamwork (Lowell), Brockton Area Multiservice (Brockton), and

Worcester Community Action Council (Worcester). These programs target groups that historically have had low rates of participation in the food stamp program such as non-English speaking and rural populations. Project Bread also operates a toll-free hotline number that provides information and pre-screening for food stamp eligibility, and advice on how to apply for benefits. The legislature has allocated \$500,000 for food stamp outreach services for state FY2000, a 25% increase over FY1999 funding.

- ❑ Funding nutritional educational programs operated by the University of Massachusetts at \$1.4 million for the current year.
- ❑ Simplifying the food stamp application process for working households. Beginning in June 1999, these households need only have face to face interviews once a year to be recertified for food stamps.
- ❑ Requesting a waiver from USDA so that families would have to report changes in income less frequently, thereby lessening the burden of participating in the food stamp program.
- ❑ Developing procedures to expand categorical eligibility for food stamps to households receiving services from programs funded by the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) block grant.
- ❑ Mailings to all closed cases detailing services and programs that these households could still be eligible for, including food stamps.

This study's findings on food stamp participation and food security of former welfare households highlight the importance of these types of outreach and support services. In addition the Department will continue to explore means of simplifying the food stamp program and eliminating barriers to participation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Participants in the food stamp program have declined by approximately one-third both in Massachusetts and nationally since 1995. Where this decline is the result of economic gains by low-income workers, the outcome is positive. On the other hand, if families are going hungry while eligible for benefits, additional action is needed.

In April 1999, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) released a longitudinal study of households that had left the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program during the first half of 1997. We followed these former welfare households quarterly to assess how they were doing in their first year after leaving assistance. While the findings overall were positive, we were concerned that approximately one-sixth of former welfare recipients was experiencing food problems, yet was not receiving food stamps. We conducted this follow-up study to better understand the dynamics of food stamp participation and food security after welfare.

We randomly selected 873 households whose TAFDC case had closed between September 1, 1998 and November 14, 1998 (before time limits closed some TAFDC cases) for in-depth interviews. Of these, one hundred forty (140) households did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study.¹ We completed 582 interviews for a response rate of 79.4% when these 140 cases are omitted. We paid respondents \$25 for the interviews which were conducted between March and May 1999.

This report analyzes data on food stamp participation after welfare and examines the reasons respondents gave for not participating in the food stamp program after leaving assistance. In one unique aspect of this study, we were able to determine preliminary eligibility for respondents who were interested. These results are reported in Section 2. Section 3 reports findings on food security for various types of households. Section 4 discusses Departmental procedures for continuing food stamp eligibility after leaving welfare and what respondents remember being told by the Department on the subject. Section 5 presents other findings on respondents' well-being, employment, earnings, family income and household arrangements. Section 6 contains concluding remarks. A copy of the survey questionnaire is Attachment A.

2.0 FOOD STAMP USE AFTER WELFARE

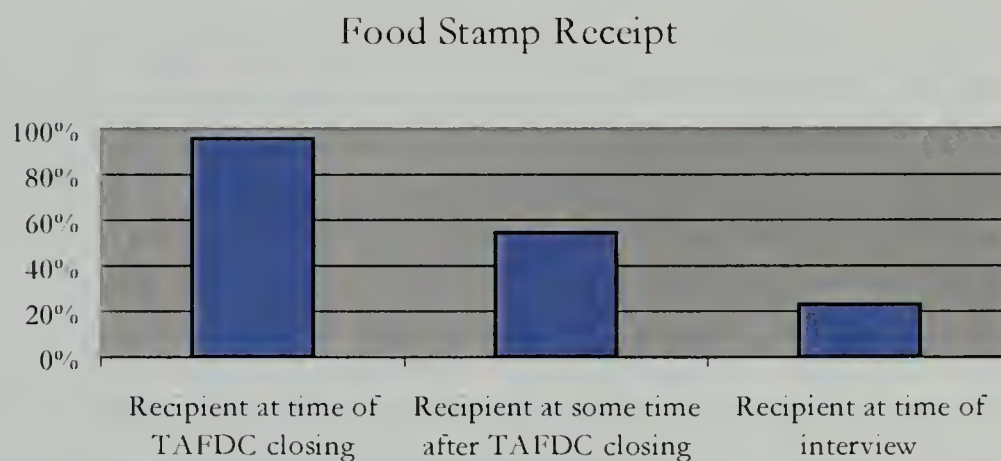
Nearly all sampled households (95.7%) were receiving food stamps at the time of their cash assistance closing, according to DTA records, but only one in four (22.9% or 133 cases) was receiving food stamps at the time of the interview. More than half of all households (54.5%) had received food stamps at some point after leaving welfare.²

¹ To be included, households must not have received TAFDC since they left assistance (at least by the time of the interview), and must not have moved out of state. In addition, because we were particularly concerned about the food security of children, at least one child who was in the household when the welfare case closed must have been living with the respondent.

² Throughout this report welfare and cash assistance are used interchangeably with TAFDC. Food stamps are not included unless specified as such.

For households receiving food stamps at the time of their cash assistance closing, food stamps instructions appear on their closing notice. The Department automatically continues or discontinues food stamp benefits in cases where information in the eligibility computer file is sufficient to make such determinations. Automatic extensions of food stamp benefits are commonly referred to as “Devered” benefits based on a 1980s court suit, *Dever v. Spirito*, which instructed the Department to make a separate eligibility determination for food stamps.

One-third of respondent households (31.6%) had food stamp benefits automatically continued (i.e., Devered benefits) for one or more months after leaving welfare, half of whom received a one-month automatic extension.³ Of the 54.5% of households who had received food stamps after their TAFDC case closed, nearly three-fifths (58.0%) had received Devered benefits.



Ten percent (9.6%) of respondents had an application for food stamps pending at the time of the interview. Less than five percent (4.1%) of respondents had had an application for food stamps denied after leaving cash assistance.

When we asked households receiving food stamps at the time of the interview about the effects of food stamps on their families’ livelihood, only one respondent said that food stamp benefits have not been helpful. The vast majority said that food stamps have been an important part of their monthly budget, enabling them to have food when money was short, and to have extra food during the month, while reducing their reliance on food pantries and other people for food.⁴

³ See Section 4 for a more complete discussion of Departmental procedures regarding continuing food stamp benefits.

⁴ To assess the importance of food stamps, interviewers read six statements on potential impacts of food stamps on the families’ livelihood. Respondents rated whether a particular effect was very important (or helpful), somewhat important, or not at all important as follows:

- ❑ 93.2% said food stamps were very helpful; 5.3% said they were somewhat helpful; one respondent (0.8%) said they were not helpful and one respondent did not answer .
- ❑ 90.2% said that a very important facet of food stamps is that they can get food when their money is short; 6.8% said this was somewhat important; and 3.0% did not respond.
- ❑ 80.5% said that getting extra food with food stamps was very important; 11.3% said that it was somewhat important; 5.3% said that it was not important and 3.0% did not respond.

Recipients receiving food stamps at the time of the interview indicated that they had encountered the following problems in applying for food stamps:

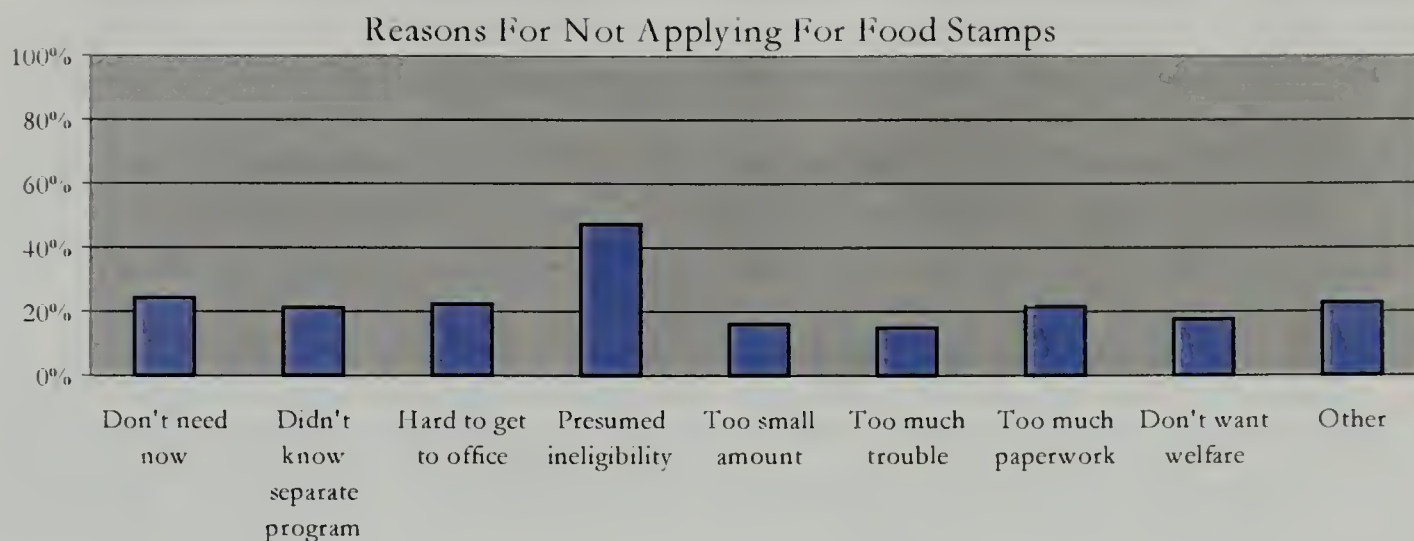
- ❑ 16.5% said that too much paperwork was definitely a problem and 39.1% said that it was somewhat of a problem.
- ❑ 22.6% said that long waits at the office were definitely a problem and 28.6% said that long waits were somewhat of a problem.
- ❑ 26.3% said that finding time in the day to apply because of work was definitely a problem and 21.8% said that it was somewhat of a problem.
- ❑ 4.5% said that finding time in the day to apply for a reason other than work was definitely a problem and 15.8% said that it was somewhat of a problem.
- ❑ 9.0% said that getting to the office to apply was definitely a problem and 21.1% said that getting to the office was somewhat of a problem.
- ❑ 12.8% reported other problems.

2.1 REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS AFTER WELFARE

We asked the 449 households who were not receiving food stamps at the time of the interview why not. Interviewers read eight possible reasons for not participating in the program, and asked respondents to indicate whether each applied to them. Respondents could also give reasons other than those read by the interviewers.

Respondents' most common explanation (47.2%) for not receiving food stamps was that they presumed they were ineligible.

-
- ❑ 85.7% said that food stamps were very important to their monthly budget; 10.5% said they were somewhat important; one case (0.8%) said they were not important; and 3.0% did not answer.
 - ❑ 82.0% said that food stamps were very important in their not asking other people for food money; 9.8% said that they were somewhat important in reducing reliance on other people; 5.3% said this was not an important aspect of food stamps; and 3.0% did not respond.
 - ❑ 78.9% said that food stamps were very important in not having to use food pantries; 11.3% said they were somewhat important in reducing reliance on food pantries; 6.8% said they were not a factor; and 3.0% did not answer.



The second most common reason [cited by one-quarter of these households (24.1%)], was that they did not need food stamps. Other reasons cited were that they:

- ❑ found it hard to get to the office to apply (22.3%).
- ❑ thought there was too much paperwork (21.4%).
- ❑ did not know that food stamps was a separate program from welfare (21.2%).
- ❑ did not want welfare (17.4%).
- ❑ thought benefits would be too small to bother (16.0%).
- ❑ thought that food stamps were not worth the trouble (14.7%).
- ❑ had another reason, mainly that they had applied or would apply, or that they had been denied (22.7%).⁵

Altogether, these households gave 929 reasons for not participating in the food stamp program, for an average of 2.1 reasons per household.⁶

2.2 ESTIMATES OF FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY

Because Departmental Quality Control reviewers⁷ conducted the interviews, we had the unique opportunity to do an assessment of respondents' food stamp eligibility. Interviewers offered the 449 households not receiving food stamps a chance to have a preliminary determination of their eligibility done. Three-quarters of these households (73.7% or 331 households) took advantage of the offer, and they were informed of the results. Of the 26.3% of households that did not have a preliminary determination done, 11.5% did not want to bother or did not want to provide income or asset information; 6.9% said they would not apply anyway; and 5.1% gave other reasons. (Data were missing on 2.7% of households.)

⁵ Because respondents could give more than one reason, the total is greater than 100%.

⁶ Among all reasons given for not participating in the food stamp program, the percentages are: presumed ineligible (22.8%); don't need food stamps (11.6%); hard to get to the office to apply (10.8%); too much paperwork (10.3%); didn't know that the food stamp program was separate from TAFDC (10.2%); don't want welfare (8.4%); thought they would get a small amount (7.8%); not worth the trouble (7.1%); and other reasons (11.0%).

⁷ In accordance with Federal requirements, quality control staff independently verify a sample of eligibility determinations made by the Department's eligibility workers.

Interviewers determined that 182 households not receiving food stamps (55.0% of the 331 households who had a preliminary determination done) were possibly eligible. The potential benefits for these households were substantial:

- ❑ one-fourth qualified for estimated benefits of \$95 or less monthly.
- ❑ one-fourth qualified for estimated monthly benefits of \$96 to \$170.
- ❑ one-fourth qualified for estimated monthly benefits of \$171 to \$267.
- ❑ one-fourth qualified for estimated benefits greater than \$267 monthly.

The estimated median benefit for these households was \$170 monthly, and the estimated mean benefit was \$182 a month. Monthly benefits ranged from an estimated low of \$10 to a high of \$497⁸. To get some measure of whether their preliminary eligibility information affected whether they subsequently applied for food stamps, we examined food stamp administrative records as of September 1999. (The interviews were conducted between March and May 1999.) Following their interviews, 38.5% of the 182 households classified as possibly eligible had received food stamps by September 1999. Among higher benefit level families, just slightly less than half of the families had received food stamps between their interview and the end of September 1999. Among the lowest benefit level households only one quarter had received benefits after their interview. See Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship between estimated food stamp benefits and participation rates:
Possibly eligible households (n=182)

Estimated Food Stamp Benefit (Quartile)	Average Food Stamp Benefit By Quartile	Number of Households By Quartile	Percent Receiving Food Stamps After Interview by Quartile
\$268+	\$338	45	44%
\$171-\$267	\$215	46	41%
\$96-\$170	\$127	44	46%
<\$96	\$50	47	23%

Two caveats are in order. First, we cannot determine the extent to which the interview eligibility information encouraged or discouraged respondents from applying for food stamps. There are indications that food stamp participation is dynamic, with households continually moving in and out of the program. Many of the households that received food stamps after the interview might have done so regardless of the preliminary determination. Second, we cannot determine how many, if any, of the 182 possibly eligible households applied but were denied. Denial rates tend to be low, however.

3.0 FOOD SECURITY

To assess the impact of leaving welfare on a family's food security, we asked respondent households about their food situation before and after leaving welfare. Food insecurity is

⁸ Approximately two percent (2.4% or 12 cases) had an estimated benefit of \$20 or less. Seven cases (1.5%) had an estimated benefit of over \$400 monthly.

officially defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”⁹

The questions used to evaluate food security drew upon the six-item “Food Security Short Form” developed for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) which operates the food stamp program. (See Attachment B for a copy.) Because of our particular interest in children’s well-being, we modified the USDA six-item short form by replacing two of the six questions on household/adult food security with two questions on children’s food security that we took from USDA’s eighteen-item index (also included in Attachment B).¹⁰ We asked about children’s food security separately from that of adults because we believed that adults were more likely to cut back on their own food before they reduced their children’s. Because of this modification, our findings on food insecurity might not be directly comparable to those based on the original USDA index.

Interviewers read six statements to respondents. The first statement applied to the household as a whole, the next three statements were about the adequacy of food eaten by adults in the household, and the last two were about the adequacy of food eaten by children in the household. For each statement, respondents reported how things were during the last three months on welfare, and how they had been since leaving welfare.

The six food security questions were:

- ❑ Statement 1. The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more. Was that “often”, “sometimes”, or “never” true?
- ❑ Statement 2. Did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?
- ❑ Statement 3. [Asked only if statement 2 is Yes, and only for the time period after leaving welfare.] How often did this happen since you left assistance – almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 month?
- ❑ Statement 4. Were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because you couldn’t afford enough food?
- ❑ Statement 5. Did any of the children ever cut the size of meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? [As with statement 2, if respondents answered yes, we then asked, “How often did this happen since you left assistance – almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 month?]
- ❑ Statement 6. Were the children ever hungry but you just couldn’t afford more food?

⁹ Price, et al; “Household Food Security in the United States: Guide to Implementing the Core Food Security Module”; prepared for U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Consumer Service; contract no. 53-3198-5-028; September 1997.

¹⁰ The two household/adult food security questions on the USDA six item form that we did not ask are:

1. Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money to buy food? and,
2. We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals. Was that often, sometimes, or never true?

3.1 OVERALL TRENDS IN FOOD SECURITY

We compared respondents' food security during the final months on welfare and after welfare:

- ❑ Similar proportions of respondents reported food shortages both before and after leaving welfare. Fifty-two percent (52.4%) of respondents reported that they either ran out of food often (13.7%) or sometimes (38.7%) during the last three months on welfare, compared to 54.8% of respondents who said that they have run out of food often (17.9%) or sometimes (36.9%) since leaving cash assistance.
- ❑ Slightly more respondents reported adults going without food after leaving assistance. Twenty-seven percent (26.8%) of respondents reported that because there wasn't enough money, an adult cut the size of meals or skipped meals during the final months on welfare compared to 30.4% of respondents who said that this had happened since leaving assistance.
- ❑ Of those households reporting that an adult cut the size or skipped meals since leaving assistance, 58.8% said that it happened almost every month; 33.3% said it happened some months but not every month; and 7.9% said that it had only happened one month.
- ❑ More adults reported being hungry after leaving assistance than before leaving. Twelve percent (12.0%) of respondents reported that an adult went hungry at some point during the last three months on welfare compared to 18.6% of respondents who reported adult hunger after leaving welfare.
- ❑ Similar proportions of children had food shortages before and after leaving assistance. Seven percent (7.4%) of respondents reported that their children reduced the size of meals or skipped meals at some point during the last three months on welfare compared to 8.8% who said that this has happened since leaving welfare. Of those households reporting that their children cut the size or skipped meals since leaving assistance, 54.9% said that it happened almost every month; 31.4% said it happened some months but not every month; and 7.8% said that it had only happened one month. (Six percent (5.9%) did not remember or did not answer.)
- ❑ A higher proportion of households reported children going hungry after leaving assistance than before. Five percent (5.2%) of respondents reported that their children went hungry at some point during the last three months on welfare compared to 7.6% of households who reported that this has happened since leaving welfare.

While the overall pattern reflects small changes in food security, various groups within the respondent population show different patterns.

3.2 FOOD SECURITY: SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

Based on the preliminary food stamp eligibility determinations done by the interviewers, we divided the 582 households participating in the survey into three groups:

- ❑ food stamp recipient households (n=133)
- ❑ households possibly eligible for food stamps but not receiving them at the time of the interview (n=182)
- ❑ households not receiving food stamps at the time of the interview who were classified as ineligible by the interviewer or whose status was unknown because they

did not choose to have a preliminary food stamp eligibility determination done (n=267).

We compared food security among these three groups of respondents, as seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2. FOOD SECURITY: SUBGROUP FINDINGS

	Food stamp households (n=133)		Possibly eligible households (n=182)		Ineligible or status unknown households (n=267)	
	Percent having problem on welfare	Percent having problem after welfare	Percent having problem on welfare	Percent having problem after welfare	Percent having problem on welfare	Percent having problem after welfare
Food ran out*	56.4	56.4	53.8	70.3	49.4	43.5
Adult cut or skipped meals	26.3	24.8	28.6	41.2	25.8	25.8
Adult hungry	10.5	18.8	15.4	25.3	10.5	13.9
Children cut or skipped meal	4.5	6.0	10.4	14.8	6.7	6.0
Children hungry	5.3	4.5	6.6	13.7	4.1	4.9
* This category includes respondents who reported that they often or sometimes ran out of food. For the rest of the categories, the percentages represent the number of respondents agreeing.						

Generally food stamp households and households classified as ineligible or of unknown status showed little or no change in food security after leaving welfare. In contrast, households classified as possibly eligible showed appreciable increases in food insecurity in each of the five areas surveyed:

- The percentage of possibly eligible households that reported running out of food increased by 16.5% after leaving welfare¹¹, while the percentages of households in the other two groups either remained the same (food stamp households) or decreased somewhat (ineligible/unknown status households) after welfare.

¹¹ These percentages include respondents who reported running out of food *often* and respondents reporting running out of food *sometimes*. Of those possibly eligible respondents who ran out of food *often*, 13.7% did so during the last three months on welfare, compared to 27.5%, who reported doing so after cash assistance.

- ❑ The percentage of possibly eligible households in which an adult had cut the size of or skipped meals increased by 12.6% after welfare while the other two groups experienced no increase.
- ❑ All three groups reported increases in adult hunger after welfare, but the possibly eligible households had the largest increase at 9.9%, followed by food stamp households at 8.3% and ineligible/unknown status households at 3.4%.
- ❑ The percentage of possibly eligible households that reported cutting back on children's meals increased by 4.4% after welfare compared to virtually no increase for the ineligible/unknown status households and the food stamp households.
- ❑ The percentage of possibly eligible households in which children went hungry increased by 7.1% while the incidence of children's hunger in the other two groups was virtually the same after leaving welfare.

As reported in Section 2.2 above, 38.5% of possibly eligible households had received food stamps sometime between the interview and September 1999. Among those households, families who returned were more likely to have reported food insecurity during their interview. Just under half (48.6%) of the 70 possibly eligible households who returned to food stamps reported food insecurity¹² after leaving welfare, compared to 38.4% of the 112 possibly eligible households who did not return.

3.3 OTHER FOOD ASSISTANCE

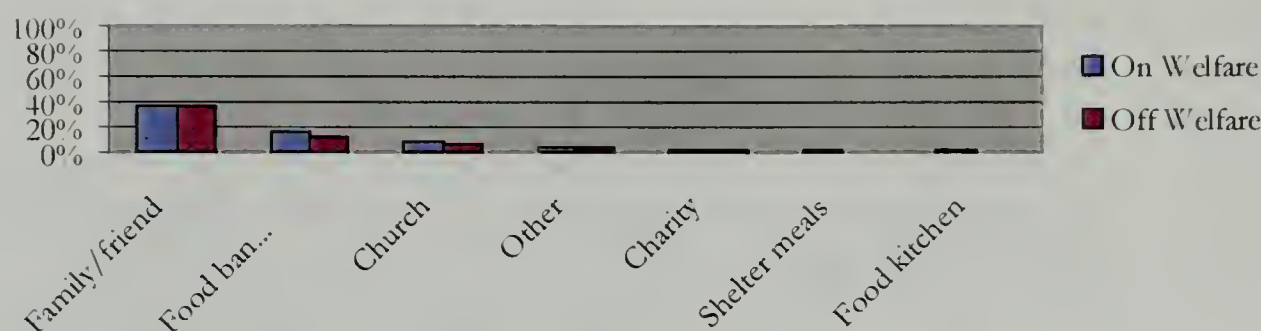
We analyzed the extent to which respondents reported food assistance from food pantries, food kitchens, relatives and friends, among others. Interviewers read a list of potential sources of food assistance and asked respondents which, if any, they had used during the last three months on welfare and since leaving welfare. (See Section E of the survey questionnaire in Attachment A.)

Overall, respondents were somewhat less likely to get assistance with food after leaving welfare than during the final months on welfare. Forty-six percent of respondents (46.4%) used one or more food assistance programs during the last three months on welfare, compared to 43.0% who did so after welfare.

Family and friends were the most common source of help by far. Approximately one-third of respondents received some form of assistance from family and friends during the final months on welfare (36.3%) and after welfare (35.2%).

¹² Households were classified as food insecure if they gave two or more affirmative responses to the food questions reported in Table 2. See Section 3.4 of this report for a fuller discussion of measuring food insecurity.

Food Assistance On and Off Welfare



Food banks and food pantries were the second most common source of help, but respondents' reliance on these supports dropped considerably after leaving welfare. Seventeen percent (17.0%) of households used food banks and food pantries during the final months on welfare compared to 11.9% reporting such use after welfare.

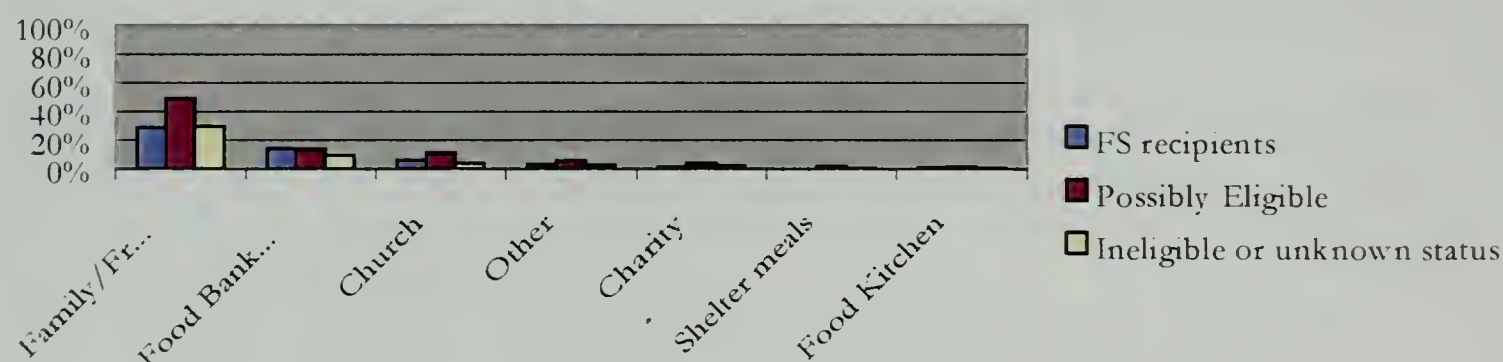
Use of food kitchens and shelter meals was negligible, with less than two percent reporting use in either time period.

Using food assistance is not necessarily associated with a more food secure household. Of 250 households receiving food assistance after leaving welfare, just over half (54.8%) were food insecure (i.e., reported two or more food problems).

3.3.1 Food Assistance Among Subgroups

Respondents classified as possibly eligible were much more likely (48.9%) to get support from family and friends than either respondents receiving food stamps (28.6%), or respondents classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown (29.2%).

Food Assistance Among Subgroups



After leaving welfare 11.0% of households classified as possibly eligible received food assistance from churches compared to 6.0% of food stamp households and 3.7% of households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown.

Households classified as possibly eligible and food stamp households used food banks and food pantries in similar proportions after welfare, 13.7% and 14.3% respectively. Nine percent (9.4%) of households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown used food banks and food pantries after welfare.

3.4 SUMMARY – FOOD SECURITY FINDINGS

According to USDA guidelines, two or more affirmative responses to the original six-item “Food Security Short Form” indicate food insecurity.¹³ Applying this guideline to the findings from the modified form used here results in estimates that one-third of respondent households (31.1%) was food insecure after leaving welfare; that is, these families were not always assured of having a nutritionally adequate diet because of financial constraints.¹⁴ In comparison, 27.5% of respondents were food insecure during the final months on welfare. Most households (76.4%) did not experience a change in their food situation after leaving welfare. (Three-fifths of households (58.9%) were food secure both on and off welfare. Slightly less than one-fifth (17.5%) was food insecure both on and off welfare.) Ten percent (10.0%) of households improved their food security after leaving welfare. For 13.6% of households, their food situation got worse.

Among the subgroups, households classified as possibly eligible were much more likely to show signs of food insecurity than either of the other two groups of respondents. We estimate that 42.3% of households classified as possibly eligible were food insecure compared to 27.1% of food stamp households and 25.5% of households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown. The comparable numbers for the final months on welfare are: 30.2% of possibly eligible households were food insecure; 26.3% of food stamp households were food insecure; and 26.2% of ineligible/unknown status households were food insecure.

4.0 FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY AT WELFARE CLOSING

When closing a cash assistance case, the Department uses information available in the computer file to determine, if possible, the household’s continued eligibility for food stamps.

- If the household is eligible for food stamps, the Department automatically converts the case from a public assistance (PA) food stamp household to a non-public

¹³ *Often* and *sometimes* are considered affirmative responses to statement 1 above. *Almost every month* and *some months* are considered affirmative responses to the question on how frequently adults skipped meals or cut back on meals. Because we replaced two household questions with questions on children’s food supply our food insecurity index might be more stringent than the USDA index that we modified. Therefore, the findings presented here might not be comparable to findings based on the USDA index.

¹⁴ As noted in Section 3.0 above, food insecurity is officially defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” (Price, et al; “Household Food Security in the United States: Guide to Implementing the Core Food Security Module”; prepared for U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Consumer Service; contract no. 53-3198-5-028; September 1997.)

assistance (NPA) food stamp household¹⁵. In the closing notice for cash assistance, the Department notifies the household of the amount of food stamps that it will continue to receive and for what time period. The notice also informs the household that it will need to file a new application at the end of that period to remain eligible for food stamps.

- ❑ If the household is ineligible for food stamps, the closing notice for cash assistance advises the household that its food stamp benefits will also terminate.
- ❑ If available information is insufficient to make a food stamp eligibility determination, the Department continues food stamps for one month and notifies the household that it needs to submit a new application to continue to receive food stamps after that month.
- ❑ If the household received NPA food stamps before the cash assistance closing, the Department adjusts the NPA food stamps based on the circumstances of the case.

4.1 RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF FOOD STAMP INFORMATION RECEIVED AT TAFDC CLOSING

We asked survey respondents if they remembered whether or not the notice the Department sent them about their welfare closing told them that they might be eligible for food stamps after leaving welfare. We also asked if, prior to leaving welfare, they remembered their worker telling them that they might be eligible for food stamps after leaving welfare.

Half (51.9%) of respondents said that the closing notice for cash assistance informed them that they might be eligible for food stamps after welfare. Similarly, 51.5% of respondents remembered their caseworker telling them that they might be eligible for food stamps after their cash assistance case closed.

4.2 CLOSING NOTICES – GROUP DIFFERENCES

Food stamp recipients were much more likely than respondents not receiving food stamps to say that the Department notified them of potential food stamp eligibility at the time of their welfare closing. Two-thirds (66.9%) of food stamp households said that they remember that the written notice of their welfare closing notified them of possible food stamp eligibility after welfare. A similar percentage (68.4%) reported that they remember their caseworker notifying them of potential eligibility. The corresponding percentages for households not receiving food stamps were 47.4% and 46.5%, respectively.

¹⁵ In public assistance (PA) households, all members receive a cash grant under TAFDC or the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC) program. (SSI recipients and family cap children are also included in PA cases if all other household members receive cash assistance under TAFDC or EAEDC. Households in the Full Employment Program are also considered PA cases.) In NPA food stamp households, some or all members of the household are not receiving cash assistance under TAFDC, EAEDC, or SSI. Cases can move from PA to NPA status if they stop receiving cash assistance or if the household composition changes so that at least one member of the household is not receiving cash assistance, except as noted above.

Two-thirds of food stamp recipients (66.9%) said that being notified of potential eligibility by the Department was either very or somewhat important in their decision to continue to receive food stamps. One-fifth (21.1%) said it was not at all important, and the remaining 12.0% did not remember or did not answer.

When asked if they would have applied for food stamps if the Department had notified them about their availability, 59.7% of households not receiving food stamps agreed. Approximately three out of ten (27.6%) said that they would not have applied. Nine percent (9.4%) did not answer, and the remaining 3.3% had applied but were denied.

Households classified as possibly eligible were more likely to say that they would have applied for food stamps if notified about their eligibility (69.8%) than households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown (52.8%).¹⁶

4.3 DEPARTMENTAL CLOSING NOTICES

Based on respondents' perceptions, we reviewed the Department's closing notices for cash assistance. As noted above, the Department automatically continues or discontinues food stamp benefits for cases based on information in the eligibility computer file. Automatic extensions of food stamp benefits are commonly referred to as "Devered" benefits based on a 1980s court suit, *Dever v. Spirito*, which instructed the Department to make a separate eligibility determination for food stamps.

The food stamp instructions included on closing notices are of four basic types:

1. When the Department determines a case eligible for food stamps, the welfare closing notice includes the new amount of food stamp benefits the household will continue to receive and the period of certification.
2. When data are insufficient to make an eligibility determination, the Department extends food stamps for one month and advises the recipient of the need to file a new application if (s)he wants to continue receiving benefits at the end of that month.
3. When the Department determines a case ineligible because the household's income or assets are also too high to receive food stamps, the notice informs recipients accordingly.
4. When the Department determines a case ineligible for reasons other than income or assets, such as noncooperation with a program requirement, the notice tells the recipient that their food stamps will stop for the same reason as the TAFDC closing.

The three groups of households we examined above showed substantial differences in their reasons for closing.

- ❑ Food stamp households and ineligible/unknown status households were more likely to close for earnings than possibly eligible households. (With earnings closings,

¹⁶ Interestingly, only 38.5% of possibly eligible households had returned to food stamps after the interview even though the Quality Control interviewers had advised these households that they appeared to be eligible and had told them the amount of benefits they might receive.

households are generally notified of the results of the eligibility determination for food stamps in the closing notice.)

- Possibly eligible households were more likely to close for failure to cooperate with a program requirement than food stamp households and ineligible/unknown status households. (For failure to cooperate closings, households are generally notified that their food stamps will end simultaneously, and for the same reason, as the TAFDC closing.¹⁷)

5.0 WELL-BEING, EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS, FAMILY INCOME, AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

In addition to food stamp participation and food security questions, we asked respondents about their well-being, employment, earnings, family income and household composition.

5.1 RESPONDENTS' WELL-BEING

Similar to findings from the Department's earlier study of closed cases¹⁸, the majority (66.3%) of respondents reported that they were better off financially since leaving welfare:

- 25.4% said that they were much better financially;
- 40.9% said that they were a little better financially;
- 16.7% said that they were the same financially;
- 10.8% said that they were a little worse financially; and
- 6.2% said that they were much worse financially.

Beyond financial well-being, 70.0% of families reported they were better in general:

- 30.8% felt much better;
- 39.2% felt a little better;
- 16.5% felt the same;
- 7.7% felt a little worse; and
- 5.8% felt much worse.

5.1.1 Well-Being: Group Differences

Households classified as possibly eligible for food stamps expressed less satisfaction with their financial well-being after welfare than either of the other two groups:

- 64.7% of food stamp households and 73.4% of ineligible/unknown status households reported improved financial well-being, while a smaller majority (57.1%) of households classified as possibly eligible reported improved financial well-being.
- 15.8% of food stamp households and 9.7% of ineligible/unknown status households reported things getting worse financially, compared to 27.6% of the possibly eligible group.

¹⁷ Interestingly, there were not statistically significant differences (at the .10 significance level) in closing action reason between the 70 possibly eligible households who returned to food stamps after the interview and the 112 who did not.)

¹⁸ *How Are They Doing? A Longitudinal Study of Households Leaving Welfare Under Massachusetts Reform*, April 1999, p. 9. Three-quarters (74.1%) reported being financially better off or the same after leaving welfare. Eighty percent (79.5%) reported generally feeling better off or the same after welfare.

As with financial well-being, households classified as possibly eligible for food stamps expressed less satisfaction with their general well-being after welfare than food stamp households and ineligible/status unknown households.

- ❑ 69.1% of food stamp households and 76.0% of ineligible/unknown status households felt that things had improved generally since leaving welfare, compared to 61.6% of possibly eligible households.
- ❑ 12.1% of food stamp households and 9.0% of ineligible/unknown status households felt things had worsened generally since leaving welfare, compared to 21.4% of possibly eligible households.

5.2 EMPLOYMENT/EARNINGS/BENEFITS

Nearly nine in ten respondents (88.8%) reported that either the respondent or partner had worked at some time since leaving welfare. Four of five respondent households (79.7%) had an adult (respondent or spouse) working at the time of the interview.

Three-quarters of respondents (74.6% or 434 cases) were working at the time of the interview. Seventy-three (73) of 134 partners present were working at the time of the interview for an employment rate of 54.5% for partners.

Looking at households instead of individuals, two-thirds of households (67.2%) had only the respondent working. In five percent of the households (5.2%), only the partner was working, and in seven percent of the households (7.4%), both the respondent and partner were working.

5.2.1 Respondent Employment Data

As noted above, three-quarters of respondents (74.6% or 434 cases) reported that they were working at the time of the interview, an average of 33 hours a week, with a median of 35 hours a week. Median earnings were \$270 weekly, and average earnings were \$289 weekly.

- ❑ One-quarter of respondents made \$200 or less weekly;
- ❑ One-quarter of respondents made between \$201 and \$270 weekly;
- ❑ One-quarter of respondents made between \$271 and \$350 weekly; and
- ❑ One-quarter of respondents made more than \$350 weekly.

Among the subgroups, respondents in food stamp households had the lowest average earnings at \$231 a week, with median earnings of \$232 a week. Respondents in possibly eligible households had average earnings that were not much different from food stamp households at \$242 a week, with median earnings of \$228 a week. In contrast, respondents in households classified as ineligible or with an unknown status reported average earnings considerably higher than respondents in the other two groups at \$341 a week, with median earnings of \$320 a week.

5.2.2 Partner Employment Data

Seventy-three (73) partners were working at the time of the interview for an employment rate of 54.5% for partners. The average hours of work weekly were 37.8 hours, with a

median of 40. Median earnings of partners were \$340, and average earnings were \$381 weekly.

- ❑ One-quarter of partners made \$250 or less weekly;
- ❑ One-quarter made between \$251 and \$340 weekly;
- ❑ One-quarter made between \$341 and \$420 weekly; and
- ❑ One-quarter made more than \$420 weekly.

Among the three subgroups, earnings for partners varied more than for respondents but caution is needed in interpreting the findings because the number of cases in each category is small. Earnings of partners were: average earnings of \$216 a week, and median earnings of \$200 a week in food stamp households (n=11); average earnings of \$297 a week, and median earnings of \$325 a week in possibly eligible households (n=13); and average earnings of \$443 a week, and median earnings of \$400 a week in ineligible/unknown status households (n=47)¹⁹.

5.3 TOTAL FAMILY INCOME

Nearly all respondents (98.8%) provided information on total family income. More than two-fifths of households (43.0%) reported family income greater than \$15,600 a year. Twelve percent (11.9%) reported family income greater than \$26,080. At the other end of the scale, one-quarter of households (27.6%) reported yearly income of less than \$10,361. Median family income was \$14,389 annually.

Table 3. Total Family Income

Annual Family Income	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
\$7,740 or less	91	15.6	15.8
\$7,741 to \$10,360	70	12.0	28.0
\$10,361 to \$12,980	84	14.4	42.6
\$12,981 to \$15,600	80	13.7	56.5
\$15,601 to \$18,220	71	12.2	68.9
\$18,221 to \$20,800	59	10.1	79.1
\$20,801 to \$23,460	33	5.7	84.9
\$23,461 to \$26,080	18	3.1	88.0
\$26,081 or more	69	11.9	100.0
Total	575	98.8	
Missing	7	1.2	
Total	582	100.0	

5.4 HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Eighty-eight (88) or 15.1% of respondent households had a partner present at the time they left assistance, compared to 134 households (23.0%) who had a partner present at the time of the survey.

¹⁹ While 73 households reported a working partner, only 71 reported partners' earnings.

The number of children in respondent households (1,139 children) when they left welfare was essentially the same at the time of the interview (1,135 children).

During the final months on welfare, 55 households included other individuals (not a partner or child), compared to 64 households that included other individuals after leaving welfare. Ninety-five (95) other individuals were in respondent households before they left welfare, compared to 115 present at the time of the interview.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Findings from this study indicate that food stamp participation is a complex phenomenon. The 449 households not receiving food stamps at the time of the interview gave 929 reasons, or an average of 2.1 reasons per household, for not participating in the program. Nearly half (47.2%) said they presumed they were ineligible. The second most common explanation for not participating in the food stamp program, given by one-quarter (24.1%) of these households, was that they did not need food stamps. Twenty-two percent (22.3%) found it inconvenient to go to the office to apply, the third most frequent reason.

Only 38.5% of the respondents who were told during the survey that they were likely eligible for food stamps had participated in the program between their interview date (March through May 1999) and September 30, 1999. However, participation appears to be related to potential benefit levels. Not surprisingly, low benefit households were less likely to participate in the food stamp program than were high benefit households. Only one-quarter of households with estimated benefits of less than \$96 a month participated in the program after the interview, compared to 43.7% of households with estimated benefits greater than that.

We estimate that one-third of respondent households (31.1%) was food insecure after leaving welfare, compared to 27.5% during the final months on welfare. Families that were not receiving food stamps who were classified as possibly eligible were most at risk for food insecurity. Forty-two percent (42.3%) of possibly eligible households showed signs of food insecurity after leaving welfare, compared to 28.6% of food stamp recipient households and 26.2% of households classified as ineligible or whose status was unknown.

The Department is taking a number of steps to improve the food security of low-income families including:

- ❑ Funding the F.O.R. Families program operated by the Department of Public Health at \$2.9 million for state FY2000. Public Health staff follow up with all households that leave TAFDC because of the time limit and that do not recertify for food stamps (among other at-risk households) to inform them about the food stamp program and additional services that are available to assist in their transition to self-sufficiency.
- ❑ Funding food stamp outreach services provided by Project Bread (Boston), Community Teamwork (Lowell), Brockton Area Multiservice (Brockton), and Worcester Community Action Council (Worcester). These programs target groups that historically have had low rates of participation in the food stamp program such

as non-English speaking and rural populations. Project Bread also operates a toll-free hotline number that provides information and pre-screening for food stamp eligibility, and advice on how to apply for benefits. The legislature has allocated \$500,000 for food stamp outreach services for state FY2000, a 25% increase over FY1999 funding.

- ❑ Funding nutritional educational programs operated by the University of Massachusetts at \$1.4 million for the current year.
- ❑ Simplifying the food stamp application process for working households. Beginning in June 1999, these households need only have face to face interviews once a year to be recertified for food stamps.
- ❑ Requesting a waiver from USDA so that families would have to report changes in income less frequently, thereby lessening the burden of participating in the food stamp program.
- ❑ Developing procedures to expand categorical eligibility for food stamps to households receiving services from programs funded by the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) block grant.
- ❑ Mailings to all closed cases detailing services and programs that these households could still be eligible for, including food stamps.

This study's findings on food stamp participation and food security of former welfare households highlight the importance of these types of outreach and support services. In addition the Department will continue to explore means of simplifying the food stamp program.

ATTACHMENT A
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Review #:

**REVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND CHILD CARE
FOR CLOSED TAFDC CASES**

This first section is about your experience since leaving TAFDC.

1. HAVE YOU REAPPLIED FOR TAFDC SINCE YOU LEFT IN [OCTOBER/NOVEMBER]? ☐

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

2. HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR FOOD STAMPS SINCE YOU LEFT IN [OCTOBER/NOVEMBER]? ☐

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

3. ARE YOU CURRENTLY RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS? ☐

- 1. Yes
- 2. No, application is pending
- 3. No, application was denied.
- 4. No, did not complete the process.
- 5. No, did not apply.

If Yes, ask Questions 4-19.

If No, skip to Question 20 (Page 4).

4. HAVE YOU BEEN RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS CONTINUOUSLY SINCE LEAVING TAFDC, OR DID YOU RE-APPLY FOR THEM? ☐

- 1. Received continuously.
- 2. Applied separately.

5. ***BEFORE YOU LEFT TAFDC DID YOUR WORKER TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS AFTER LEAVING TAFDC?*** ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer ***(DO NOT READ)***

6. ***DID THE NOTICE WE SENT YOU ABOUT CLOSING YOUR TAFDC CASE TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS AFTER LEAVING TAFDC?*** ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer ***(DO NOT READ)***

7. ***HOW IMPORTANT WAS THAT NOTICE IN YOUR DECISION TO CONTINUE RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS?*** ☐

1. Very important
2. Somewhat important
3. Not at all important
4. Don't remember or Didn't answer. ***(DO NOT READ)***

FOR THE NEXT SIX QUESTIONS PLEASE TELL ME IF THE STATEMENT WAS VERY IMPORTANT, SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, OR NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT TO YOU.

1=VERY IMPORTANT 2=SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT 3=NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT

4=DON'T REMEMBER / DID NOT RESPOND (DO NOT READ.)

8. ☐ **Having food stamps has been helpful to my household.**
9. ☐ **Food Stamps let us have food when our money is short.**
10. ☐ **Food Stamps mean we can get some extra food during the month.**
11. ☐ **Food Stamps are an important part of our budget every month.**
12. ☐ **Food Stamps make it so we don't have to ask other people for money for food.**
13. ☐ **Food Stamps make it so we don't have to go to places like food pantries for food.**

PEOPLE SOMETIMES HAVE PROBLEMS APPLYING FOR FOOD STAMPS. FOR THE NEXT SIX QUESTIONS PLEASE TELL ME IF THE STATEMENT WAS DEFINITELY TRUE, SOMEWHAT TRUE, OR NOT AT ALL TRUE FOR YOU IN YOUR DECISION.

**1=Definitely true 2=Somewhat true 3=Not at all true
4=Didn't answer/Did not respond (DO NOT READ)**

14. ☐ There was too much paperwork.
15. ☐ I had trouble getting to the office.
16. ☐ It was hard to find time during the day because I work.
17. ☐ It was hard to find time to get to the office for some other reason.
Please specify: _____
18. ☐ I had to wait a long time at the office.
19. ☐ I had a different problem. (Please specify: _____)

Do you have any suggestions on how we could make the Food Stamps application process easier?

Go to Question 32 (Page 5)

For Households Not Receiving Food Stamps

THERE ARE MANY REASONS THAT HOUSEHOLDS DON'T RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS. PLEASE LISTEN TO THE FOLLOWING LIST OF SOME REASONS AND INDICATE WHETHER EACH WAS A REASON FOR YOU NOT TO APPLY.

20. ☐ I don't need food stamps right now.
21. ☐ I didn't know food stamps was a separate program from TAFDC.
22. ☐ It was too hard to get to the office to apply.
23. ☐ I didn't think I would be eligible for food stamps.
24. ☐ I thought I would only get a small amount of food stamps.
25. ☐ It isn't worth the trouble.
26. ☐ There is too much paperwork.
27. ☐ I don't want welfare.
28. ☐ Other (Please specify: _____)

29. BEFORE YOU LEFT TAFDC, DID YOUR WORKER TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS AFTER LEAVING TAFDC? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

30. DID THE NOTICE WE SENT YOU ABOUT CLOSING YOUR TAFDC CASE TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS AFTER LEAVING TAFDC? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

31. WOULD YOU HAVE APPLIED FOR FOOD STAMPS IF WE HAD NOTIFIED YOU ABOUT THEIR AVAILABILITY? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**
4. Applied, but denied.

FOR All Households

32. IS YOUR FAMILY BETTER OFF FINANCIALLY NOW THAN WHEN YOU WERE ON WELFARE? ☐

1. Much better
2. Little better
3. Same
4. Little worse
5. Much worse

33. IN GENERAL, DO YOU THINK THINGS ARE BETTER FOR YOUR FAMILY NOW THAN WHEN YOU WERE ON WELFARE? ☐

1. Much better
2. Little better
3. Same
4. Little worse
5. Much worse

B. Employment/Earnings/Benefits

Next, I'd like to ask about jobs you may have had in the last few months.

34. HAVE YOU OR YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER WORKED AT ANY TIME SINCE LEAVING TAFDC? ☐

Yes = 1 No = 2

35. ARE IS ANYONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD WORKING NOW?

(Check all that apply.)

Respondent
Spouse/Partner

Avg. Hours
per Week

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Avg. Gross
Weekly Income

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Enter "0" for no income.

36. PLEASE ESTIMATE YOUR TOTAL FAMILY INCOME INCLUDING WAGES, PENSIONS, SOCIAL SECURITY, AND ALL OTHER SOURCES. PLEASE INCLUDE EVERYONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

		Did not answer (DO NOT READ) <input type="checkbox"/>	
<u>ANNUAL</u>	OR	<u>MONTHLY</u>	OR <u>WEEKLY</u>
\$7,740 or less		\$645 or less	\$150 or less <input type="checkbox"/> 1.
\$7,741 to \$10,360		\$646 to \$863	\$151 to \$200 <input type="checkbox"/> 2.
\$10,361 to \$12,980		\$864 to \$1081	\$201 to \$250 <input type="checkbox"/> 3.
\$12,981 to \$15,600		\$1082 to \$1300	\$251 to \$300 <input type="checkbox"/> 4.
\$15,601 to \$18,220		\$1301 to \$1518	\$301 to \$350 <input type="checkbox"/> 5.
\$18,221 to \$20,800		\$1519 to \$1736	\$351 to \$400 <input type="checkbox"/> 6.
\$20,801 to \$23,460		\$1737 to \$1955	\$401 to \$450 <input type="checkbox"/> 7.
\$23,461 to \$26,080		\$1956 to \$2173	\$451 to \$500 <input type="checkbox"/> 8.
\$26,081 or more		\$2174 or more	\$501 or more <input type="checkbox"/> 9.

C. Household Composition / Housing

Now I'd like to ask about who lives with you and about the place where you live.

37. WHEN YOU LEFT ASSISTANCE WHO WAS LIVING IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

☐ Spouse / Partner (not the father of any children)

☐ Spouse / Partner (who is the father of one or more children)

☐ ☐ # of Children

☐ ☐ # of Others

38. HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE THERE NOW?

☐ Spouse / Partner (not the father of any children)

☐ Spouse / Partner (who is the father of one or more children)

☐ ☐ # of Children

☐ ☐ # of Others

39. HOW OLD ARE THE CHILDREN 18 OR YOUNGER LIVING WITH YOU NOW?

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

E. Food Security

The next few questions are about your food and eating since you left assistance.

I'm going to read you several statements that people have made about their food situation. The next few questions will ask you to compare how things were during the last three months on TAFDC to how things have been since you left TAFDC. Please listen carefully to each question.

40. *"THE FOOD THAT WE BOUGHT JUST DIDN'T LAST, AND WE DIDN'T HAVE MONEY TO GET MORE." FOR THE LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC WAS THAT OFTEN, SOMETIMES, OR NEVER TRUE FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD?* ☐

1. Often true
2. Sometimes true
3. Never true
4. Don't Remember / Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

41. *"THE FOOD THAT WE BOUGHT JUST DIDN'T LAST, AND WE DIDN'T HAVE MONEY TO GET MORE." SINCE YOU LEFT TAFDC WAS THAT OFTEN, SOMETIMES, OR NEVER TRUE FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD?* ☐

1. Often true
2. Sometimes true
3. Never true
4. Don't Remember / Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

The following four questions are about food eaten by adults in your household.

42. *IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC DID YOU OR OTHER ADULTS IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD EVER CUT THE SIZE OF YOUR MEALS OR SKIP MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD?* ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

43. SINCE YOU LEFT TAFDC DID YOU OR OTHER ADULTS IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD EVER CUT THE SIZE OF YOUR MEALS OR SKIP MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No (Skip Q 44)
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer (Skip Q 44.) **(DO NOT READ)**

44. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK.] HOW OFTEN DID THIS HAPPEN SINCE YOU LEFT ASSISTANCE--ALMOST EVERY MONTH, SOME MONTHS BUT NOT EVERY MONTH, OR IN ONLY 1 MONTH? ☐

1. Almost every month
2. Some months but not every month
3. Only 1 month
4. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

45. IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC, WERE YOU EVER HUNGRY BUT DIDN'T EAT BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T AFFORD ENOUGH FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

46. SINCE YOU LEFT TAFDC, WERE YOU EVER HUNGRY BUT DIDN'T EAT BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T AFFORD ENOUGH FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

The next four questions are about food eaten by children under 18 in your household.

[If no children skip to Q 51.]

47. IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC, DID ANY OF THE CHILDREN EVER SKIP OR CUT THE SIZE OF THEIR MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

48. SINCE YOU LEFT TAFDC, DID ANY OF THE CHILDREN EVER SKIP OR CUT THE SIZE OF THEIR MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No (Skip 49)
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer (Skip 49). **(DO NOT READ)**

49. [IF YES ABOVE ASK.] How often did this happen since you left TAFDC – almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 month? ☐

1. Almost every month
2. Some months but not every month
3. Only 1 month
4. Don't Remember or Didn't answer. **(DO NOT READ)**

50. IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC, WERE THE CHILDREN EVER HUNGRY BUT YOU JUST COULDN'T AFFORD MORE FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

51. SINCE YOU LEFT TAFDC, WERE THE CHILDREN EVER HUNGRY BUT YOU JUST COULDN'T AFFORD MORE FOOD? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

52. DURING YOUR LAST THREE MONTHS ON TAFDC, DID YOU USE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FOR FREE FOOD OR TO GET MONEY FOR FOOD? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

- ☐ Family/friends
- ☐ Food bank / food pantry
- ☐ Prepared meals at a shelter
- ☐ Prepared meals at a food kitchen
- ☐ Church
- ☐ Charity
- ☐ Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**
- ☐ Other: _____

53. *IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS, DID YOU EVER GO SOMEWHERE FOR FREE FOOD OR TO GET MONEY FOR FOOD? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)*

- ☐ Family/friends
- ☐ Food bank / food pantry
- ☐ Prepared meals at a shelter
- ☐ Prepared meals at a food kitchen
- ☐ Church
- ☐ Charity
- ☐ Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**
- ☐ Other: _____

I. Child Care Utilization

The next few questions ask about your children under age 14 and who cares for them.

FOR CHILDREN 0 TO 2:

54. *HOW MANY CHILDREN LIVING WITH YOU ARE 2 YEARS OLD OR YOUNGER?* ☐

55. *HOW MANY OF THESE CHILDREN, AGE 2 AND UNDER, ARE USING CHILD CARE, EITHER FREE OR PAID?* ☐

56. *WHO PAYS FOR THE CARE? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)*

- ☐ Self
- ☐ State
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No one / Not paid

57. *IS THE CARE USED BECAUSE THE CHILD'S MOTHER OR FATHER IS WORKING?*

☐ Yes=1 No=2

FOR CHILDREN 3 TO 5:

58. HOW MANY CHILDREN LIVING WITH YOU ARE 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD? ☐

59. HOW MANY OF THESE CHILDREN, AGE 3 TO 5, ARE USING CHILD CARE, EITHER FREE OR PAID? ☐

60. WHO PAYS FOR THE CARE? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

- ☐ Self
- ☐ State
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No one / Not paid

61. IS THE CARE USED BECAUSE THE CHILD'S MOTHER OR FATHER IS WORKING?

☐ Yes=1 No=2

FOR CHILDREN 6 TO 13:

62. HOW MANY CHILDREN LIVING WITH YOU ARE 6 TO 13 YEARS OLD? ☐

63. HOW MANY OF THESE CHILDREN, AGE 6 TO 13, ARE USING CHILD CARE, EITHER FREE OR PAID? ☐

64. WHO PAYS FOR THE CARE? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

- ☐ Self
- ☐ State
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No one / Not paid

65. IS THE CARE USED BECAUSE THE CHILD'S MOTHER OR FATHER IS WORKING?

☐ Yes=1 No=2

66. DO YOU KNOW THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE HAS A PROGRAM CALLED TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE THAT WILL PAY FOR CHILD CARE FOR ONE YEAR AFTER YOU LEAVE WELFARE FOR WORK?

☐ Yes=1 No=2 NA=3

67. HAVE YOU EVER USED OR ARE YOU NOW USING TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE BENEFITS?

☐ Yes=1 No=2 NA=3

68. BEFORE YOU LEFT TAFDC DID YOUR WORKER TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM?

☐ Yes=1 No=2 NA=3

69. DID THE NOTICE WE SENT YOU ABOUT CLOSING YOUR TAFDC CASE TELL YOU THAT YOU MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE FOR TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE? ☐

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Remember or Didn't answer **(DO NOT READ)**

70. THE STATE OPERATES A CHILD CARE PROGRAM TO HELP PAY THE COSTS FOR FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOW INCOMES. THE PROGRAM IS CALLED INCOME ELIGIBLE CHILD CARE AND IS DIFFERENT FROM TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE. ARE YOU AWARE OF INCOME ELIGIBLE CHILD CARE?

☐ Yes=1 No=2 NA=3

ATTACHMENT B

USDA FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 2. Six-Item Short Form of the Household Food Security Scale

Instructions: These next questions are about the food eaten in your family. People do different things when they are running out of money for food in order to make their food or their food money go further.

No.^a Question

5. In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), did you (or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
8. [Ask only if #5 = YES] How often did this happen--almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?
7. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?
11. In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?

Instructions: Now I'm going to read you two statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was often, sometimes, or never true for you (or the other members of your household) in the last 12 months.

Table 2, cont.

No.	Question

2.	The first statement is “The food that [I/we] bought just didn’t last, and [I/we] didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
3.	“[I/We] couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?

<p>Scoring: Total the number of affirmative responses. (<i>Often</i> and <i>sometimes</i> are considered affirmative responses to Questions 2 and 3; <i>almost every</i> and <i>some months</i> are considered affirmative responses to Question 8.) Two or more affirmatives indicate food insecurity; five or more affirmatives indicate hunger. Alternatively, for households with some item nonresponse, classifications can be obtained by anchoring the relative severity of each item to its original estimated calibration level,¹² calculating a scale value for the household, and comparing this value to the predefined ranges set when the full scale was validated.¹²</p>	

^aItem numbers refer to Table 1.

Household Food Security in the United States

Guide to Implementing the Core Food Security Module

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND ON THE HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY MEASURES

In April 1995 the U.S. Bureau of the Census implemented the first Food Security Supplement to its regular Current Population Survey (CPS). The Food Security Supplement is the cornerstone of the food security measurement project, a cooperative undertaking of federal government agencies under the leadership of the Food and Consumer Service (FCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), jointly with the National Center for Health Statistics/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NCHS) of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The food security measurement project was begun in 1992 to carry out a key task assigned by the Ten-Year Comprehensive Plan for the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Program (NNMRRP). The task is to develop a standard measure of food insecurity and hunger for the United States, for use at national, state, and local levels.

Using the 1995 CPS data, a food security scale and a food security status measure were developed to describe the food security situation of U.S. households. The measures have already been used to present national statistics on household food security for 1995, and are expected to continue to be used as the government's primary measure of this dimension of household well-being.

Two prior reports from the food security measurement project present extensive information on the food security measures, including technical information on the development of the measures and estimates of the 1995 prevalence of household food insecurity and hunger.¹ This Guide is intended to supplement those reports by providing operational information to researchers interested in implementing the food security measures within their own work. Chapter Two identifies the questions that must be asked to construct the measures and describes the procedures for assigning food security scale values to surveyed households and then determining the household's food security status.

¹ Hamilton *et al.* 1997(a) and 1997(b).

This introductory chapter provides a brief review of key definitions and explanation of the two food security measures, and describes the kinds of situations in which the measures may be applicable. For a full understanding of the conceptual and technical underpinnings of the measures, readers are referred to the project's two main reports.

What Is Household Food Security?

Extensive research in the late 1980s focused on understanding household food security, food insecurity, and hunger. This work led to the development by an expert working group of the American Institute of Nutrition of the following conceptual definitions, which were published in 1990 by the Life Sciences Research Office (LSRO) of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology:

- **Food security** — “Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).”
- **Food insecurity** — “Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”
- **Hunger** — “The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food. Hunger may produce malnutrition over time.... Hunger ... is a potential, although not necessary, consequence of food insecurity.”

Food insecurity and hunger, as the terms are used here, are conditions resulting from *constrained financial resources*. Hunger, for example, can occur in many situations, including dieting and being too busy to eat. The measurement procedure described here, however, is concerned only with hunger that occurs because the household does not have enough food or money to buy food.

Why Measure Food Security?

One of the basic aims of U.S. public policy in the latter half of the 20th century has been to assure that all Americans have enough to eat. The President's Task Force on Food Assistance stated the theme in its 1984 Report:

It has long been an article of faith among the American people that no one in a land so blessed with plenty should go hungry.... Hunger is simply not acceptable in our society. (Task Force Report, p. 2)

Food security is an important dimension of household well-being, analogous to health or housing. Food insecurity and hunger are undesirable in their own right, and possible precursors to nutritional, health, and developmental problems. Monitoring food security is therefore necessary to understand the well-being of the American population and to identify geographic regions or population subgroups with particularly undesirable conditions.

Numerous public and private food assistance programs, operating at national, state, and local levels, attempt to ameliorate food insecurity and hunger. Accurate measurement of food insecurity and hunger enables program planners, policy makers, and the public to assess the changing needs for assistance and the effectiveness of existing programs.

Traditional income and poverty measures do not provide clear information about food security, even though food insecurity and hunger stem from constrained financial resources. Food security analysis shows that many low-income households are not food insecure, whereas some above-poverty households report experiencing food insecurity and hunger. The reasons for these differences are not yet well understood, although they probably include individuals' decisions about how to handle competing demands for limited resources as well as regional patterns of relative food prices and availability. Food security measures therefore provide different and more specific information on this dimension of household well-being than can be inferred from income data.

How Is Food Security Measured?

Food security cannot be measured directly. Instead, a household's level of food security must be determined by obtaining information on situations and behaviors that serve as indicators of the condition. Household surveys, conducted in person or by telephone, are used to get the information.

Research over the past decade has identified a substantial number of behaviors and conditions that seem to be part of the phenomenon of food insecurity and hunger. Many of these were included in the 1995 CPS Food Security Supplement, which became the basis for the food security measures presented here. Specifically, the CPS questions included here ask about four kinds of household conditions, events, and behaviors:²

- Anxiety that the household food budget or food supply may be insufficient to meet basic needs;
- Perceptions by the respondent that the food eaten by household members was inadequate in quality or quantity;
- Instances of reduced food intake by adults in the household, or consequences of reduced intake such as the physical sensation of hunger or loss of weight; and
- Instances of reduced food intake, or consequences of reduced intake, by children in the household.

All of the food security questions have two characteristics in common. Each question makes sure that the reported behavior or condition occurred because of household financial limitations by including phrases such as “because we couldn’t afford enough food” or “because there wasn’t enough money to buy food.” Also, each question asks explicitly about circumstances that occurred within the past 12 months.³

The topics covered by the food security questions reflect the findings of previous research, which shows that households go through differing behavioral stages as food insecurity becomes increasingly severe. In the first stage, households note serious inadequacy in their food supplies and food budgets, feel anxiety about the sufficiency of food to meet their basic needs, and make adjustments to their food budgets and food served. As the situation becomes more severe, the food intake of adults is reduced and adults experience hunger, but they spare the children this experience. In the third stage, children also suffer reduced food intake and hunger and adults’ reductions in food intake are more dramatic.

² The CPS questions discussed here are those included in the primary food security scale. For discussions of items not included in the scale, see Hamilton *et al.* (1997a) and (1997b).

³ The CPS also included questions asking about the past 30 days, but the primary scale is based exclusively on 12-month questions.

Although the questions cover many different situations of household food insecurity, they do not represent all dimensions of the phenomenon. The questions focus on whether the household has *enough* food or money to meet its basic food needs. Other relevant dimensions of food insecurity include food safety, the nutritional quality of the diet, and the coping behaviors that households may undertake to augment their food budget or food supply. The food security questions described here do not capture any of these dimensions.

What Is the Food Security Scale?

The various food security questions can be combined into a single overall measure called the food security scale. This measure expresses the household's level of food security or insecurity in terms of a numeric value that ranges between 0 and 10. The statistical procedure that determines a household's scale value is rather complicated, but fundamentally it depends on the number of situations of food insecurity that the household has experienced, as indicated by affirmative responses to the survey questions.⁴ A household that has not experienced any of the food insecurity situations will have a scale value of 0. A household that has experienced all of the situations covered in the questions will have a scale value of 10.

The scale thus represents the *severity* of household food insecurity. A household with a scale value of 6, for example, has experienced more severe food insecurity than a household with a scale value of 3. It is important to remember, however, that the scale measures only the *sufficiency* of the household food supply and food budget. For example, it is reasonable to suspect that households with higher scale values have less nutritionally adequate diets than households with lower scale values. The scale does not measure nutritional adequacy, however, so one cannot draw that conclusion from the scale value alone.⁵

Note also that the scale represents the condition of the *household*, not the condition of particular persons in the household. Some questions apply to the household as a whole, such as "the food we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." Others ask

⁴ The statistical approach employs a non-linear form of factor analysis known as a Rasch model. This approach is described in Hamilton *et al.* (1997b).

⁵ USDA will be conducting research over the next several years to determine the relationship of the food security scale to various measures of nutritional status.

about the experience of adults in the household, or children in the household. If the household includes more than one adult or more than one child, the question does not allow one to determine how many of the adults or children experienced the condition.

In national statistics, most households have scale values of 0, indicating that they did not experience in the past year any of the conditions of food insecurity covered in the questions. Only a very small fraction of households have values close to 10, the most severe level of food insecurity measured by the questions. Surveys measuring food security for special populations—particularly very low-income populations—are expected to show higher average scale values, but it is still likely that scale values will be concentrated at the low end of the range.

What Is the Food Security Status Measure?

It is often useful for policy purposes to simplify the food security scale into a small set of categories and to discuss the percent of the population in each category. Four categories have been defined to this end:

- ***Food secure*** — Households show no or minimal evidence of food insecurity.
- ***Food insecure without hunger*** — Food insecurity is evident in households' concerns and in adjustments to household food management, including reduced quality of diets. Little or no reduction in household members' food intake is reported.
- ***Food insecure with hunger*** — Food intake for adults in the household has been reduced to an extent that implies that adults have repeatedly experienced the physical sensation of hunger. Such reductions are not observed at this stage for children in the household.
- ***Food insecure with severe hunger*** — Households with children have reduced the children's food intake to an extent that implies that the children have experienced the physical sensation of hunger. Adults in households with and without children have repeatedly experienced more extensive reductions in food intake.

A household is classified into one of the four food security status categories on the basis of its value on the food security scale. Households with low scale values are those reporting no or very limited food insecurity or hunger experiences. These households are classified as food secure. At the other extreme, households with high scale values are those

who report experiencing all or nearly all of the conditions, and are classified as food insecure with severe hunger.

Uses and Limitations of the Food Security Measures

USDA plans to compile national statistics on food security on an annual basis. Statistics for 1995, the first year in which the CPS supplement was administered, are now available. The food security supplement has subsequently been administered in 1996 and 1997, and statistics for those years are expected to be available early in 1999. The core questions from the food security supplement—the questions discussed in this document—are to be included in a substantial number of national surveys, including the Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), the Fourth National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES-IV), the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD). Thus a great deal of information will soon be available, not only on the level of household food security in various populations, but also on the relationship of food security to nutrition, health, and other dimensions of household well-being.

The rich national data is expected to provide a backdrop for many researchers interested in measuring food security. Examples of the types of research that might use food security measures include the following:

- *Food security monitoring studies* of particular locations or particular populations. Such studies might compare the local food security situation to national patterns, assess the local need for food assistance, or track the effect of changing policies or economic conditions.
- *Food assistance program evaluations* may measure food security as a key outcome. For example, the food security status of a sample of program participants may be compared to the status of comparable households not receiving the assistance.
- *Other studies of low-income populations* may include food security as one of the dimensions of household well-being that is considered.
- *Studies of community food security* may relate community-level descriptors of food availability to household food security.

The material presented in this Guide is intended to assist researchers in implementing household food security measures in such situations. It is also important, however, for researchers to be aware of the limitations of the measures. Points to bear in mind include:

- The food security scale does not capture all possible dimensions of food insecurity. It does not measure food safety, nutritional status, or the availability of food through “socially acceptable” channels.
- The food security measures reflect the household’s situation in the 12 months before the interview. A household that is considered food insecure for the past year may be food secure at the time of the interview.⁶
- Each of the specific boundaries used to define categories of the status variable could be debated, with some people arguing that the boundary understates the number of households that are “truly” in a category, whereas others argue that the boundary exaggerates the number. The status categories are therefore most useful in comparisons. As long as the boundary is consistently defined, one can be reasonably sure that an increase or decrease in the percent of households classified in a category represents a true increase or decrease in the number of households experiencing food insecurity or hunger.
- The food security scale has been found reliable for describing the status of a population. It has not been proven reliable for assessing the status of an individual household, as in a clinical screening context.
- USDA expects to refine and improve the food security questions and scale over time. Researchers should obtain the most current version of the questions and scale to maximize comparability with national statistics.
- The food security measures have been developed for households in the United States, reflecting a relevant range of conditions in this country. Similar methodology might well be appropriate in other settings, but it is likely that different questions or at least a re-estimation of the scale would be necessary.

Used carefully, the food security measures are expected to prove extremely useful in a wide variety of research settings. The remainder of this Guide presents information on how to implement the measures.

⁶ Questions typically ask whether the household ever experienced a specified condition during the past year. Thus the measure registers the most severe status that the household experienced during the year. It does not provide information on how much of the year was characterized by that status.

**FOOD-SECURITY/HUNGER CORE MODULE:
3-STAGE DESIGN, WITH SCREENERS
USDA, Food and Consumer Service -- 7/28/97**

Stage 1: Questions 1-6 (asked of all households).
(Q1a and 1b optional.)

1. These next questions are about the food eaten in your household. [IF ONE PERSON IN HOUSEHOLD, USE "I" IN PARENTHETICALS, OTHERWISE, USE "WE."]

Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, that is, since (current month) of last year: (I/we) always have enough to eat and the kinds of food (I/we) want; (I/we) have enough to eat but NOT always the KINDS of food (I/we) want; sometimes (I/we) don't have ENOUGH to eat; or OFTEN (I/we) don't have enough to eat?

- [1] Enough and the kinds of food wanted (SKIP 1a and 1b)
- [2] Enough but not always the kinds of food wanted (SKIP 1a)
- [3] Sometimes not enough [SKIP 1b]
- [4] Often not enough [SKIP 1b]
- [] DK or Refused (SKIP 1a and 1b)

- 1a. [IF OPTION 3 OR 4 SELECTED, ASK] Here are some reasons why people don't always have enough to eat. For each one, please tell me if that is a reason why YOU don't always have enough to eat. [READ LIST. MARK ALL THAT APPLY.]

YES	NO	DK	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not enough money for food
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Too hard to get to the store
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	On a diet
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No working stove available
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not able to cook or eat because of health problems

- 1b. [IF OPTION 2 SELECTED, ASK] Here are some reasons why people don't always have the kinds of food they want or need. For each one, please tell me if that is a reason why YOU don't always have the kinds of food you want or need. [READ LIST. MARK ALL THAT APPLY.]

YES	NO	DK	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not enough money for food
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Too hard to get to the store
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	On a diet
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kinds of food (I/we) want not available
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good quality food not available

[IF SINGLE ADULT IN HOUSEHOLD, USE "I," "MY," AND "YOU" IN PARENTHETICALS; OTHERWISE, USE "WE," "OUR," AND "YOUR HOUSEHOLD."]

2. Now I'm going to read you several statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was OFTEN true, SOMETIMES true, or NEVER true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months, that is, since last (name of current month).

The first statement is "(I/We) worried whether (my/our) food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more." Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Often true
- ☐ Sometimes true
- ☐ Never true
- ☐ DK or Refused

3. "The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Often true
- ☐ Sometimes true
- ☐ Never true
- ☐ DK or Refused

4. "(I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Often true
- ☐ Sometimes true
- ☐ Never true
- ☐ DK or Refused

[IF CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN HOUSEHOLD, ASK Q5 - 7; OTHERWISE SKIP TO Q8.]

5. "(I/we) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed (my/our) child/the children) because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Often true
- ☐ Sometimes true
- ☐ Never true
- ☐ DK or Refused

6. "(I/We) couldn't feed (my/our) child/the children) a balanced meal, because (I/we) couldn't afford that." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Often true
- ☐ Sometimes true
- ☐ Never true
- ☐ DK or Refused

Stage 2: Questions 7-11 (asked of hh's passing the 1st-level Screen: estimated 40% of hh's \leq 185% Poverty; 5.5% of hh's $>$ 185% Poverty; 19% of all households).

1st-level Screen (screener for Stage 2): If affirmative response to any one of Questions 2-6 (i.e., "often true" or "sometimes true"), OR, response [3] or [4] to Question 1, then continue to Q7; otherwise, skip to end.

7. "(My/Our child was/The children were) not eating enough because (I/we) just couldn't afford enough food." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?
- ☐ Often true
 - ☐ Sometimes true
 - ☐ Never true
 - ☐ DK or Refused
8. In the last 12 months, since last (name of current month), did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No (Skip 8a)
 - ☐ DK (Skip 8a)
- 8a. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK] How often did this happen---almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
- ☐ Almost every month
 - ☐ Some months but not every month
 - ☐ Only 1 or 2 months
 - ☐ DK
9. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ DK
10. In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ DK
11. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because you didn't have enough money for food?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ DK

Stage 3: Questions 12-16 (asked of hh's passing the 2nd-level Screen: estimated 7-8% of hh's < 185% Poverty; 1-1.5% of hh's > 185% Poverty; 3-4% of all hh's).

2nd-level Screen (screener for Stage 3): If affirmative response to any one of Questions 7 through 11, then continue to Q12; otherwise, skip to end.

12. In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Skip 12a)
- ☐ DK (Skip 12a)

12a. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK] How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

- ☐ Almost every month
- ☐ Some months but not every month
- ☐ Only 1 or 2 months
- ☐ DK

[IF CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN HOUSEHOLD, ASK 13-16; OTHERWISE SKIP TO END.]

13. The next questions are about children living in the household who are under 18 years old.

In the last 12 months, since (current month) of last year, did you ever cut the size of (your child's/any of the children's) meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

14. In the last 12 months, did (CHILD'S NAME/any of the children) ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Skip 14a)
- ☐ DK (Skip 14a)

14a. [IF YES ABOVE ASK] How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

- ☐ Almost every month
- ☐ Some months but not every month
- ☐ Only 1 or 2 months
- ☐ DK

15. In the last 12 months, (was your child/ were the children) ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

16. In the last 12 months, did (your child/any of the children) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

END

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD
SUBJECT: [illegible]
DATE: [illegible]
BY: [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]